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Editor : Ganesh Lalwani

HAIL VARDHAMAN

a Hindi Drama

by

RAM KUMAR VARMA

English Translation

by

K. B. JINDAL

Issued to mark the conclusion of 2500th Nirvana Anniversary of Bhagavan Mahavira

Hail Vardhaman

Act I

[Place: Kundagram on the bank of river Gandak in the Republic of Vaishali. A garden blossoming with the fruit and flowers of spring. Time: Early morning, with the chirping of birds. Direction: Curtain rises. From the right side-screen an arrow appears to the sound of "Well done". Another arrow appears, from the left, to the anchor of "Well done". Thereafter enter two princes from the two sides—one is Vijaya and another is Sumitra. Both are carrying bows and arrows. They are dressed as hunters, with open hair, saffron garments and sandles]

Vijaya : Sumitra, have you watched the flight of the arrows darted from my bow ? Verily, it is a treat to score the bull's eye. My arrows are like rays of the sun that dispel the clouds in the horizon and set the birds chirping to music.

Sumitra : But my arrows travel faster than lightning. With every target that I hit, I can see the boundaries of the enemy's kingdom shrink and storms rage in his breast.

Vijaya : All this is alright. But recently Prince Vardhaman has banned all shooting.

Sumitra : What, shooting a taboo to a warrior prince!

Vijaya : So it is. Prince Vardhaman says ; "Do excel in marksmanship. But thou shalt not kill."

Sumitra : Of what use is marksmanship, if you constantly think of killing and non-killing. Can you incite an enemy to an open combat, without raising your voice ?

Vijaya : If you want to live in the Republic of Kundagram, you shall have to abjure all violence. Look at that

tree laiden with fruit. One feels like felling them down with arrows. And who would not like to pluck those flowers and make garlands for his beloved. But Prince Vardhaman ordains otherwise.

Sumitra : But why, why all this ? What injury there is in plucking fruit and flowers ?

Vijaya : But Prince Vardhaman thinks otherwise. He says trees have life ; they have feeling. If you strike at them, you cause injury to them. Only inanimate objects should be the target of your marksmanship.

Sumitra : Stones alone are such inanimate objects. But if you strike at them, you will blunt your own arrows. If you cannot shoot at a flying bird, if you cannot kill a ferocious animal, of what use is your archery ? Bows and arrows will cease to be weapons ; they will become mere decorations.

Vijaya : Once Prince Vardhaman said something more startling.

Sumitra : What was that ?

Vijaya : He said that there are always five targets before you. You cannot strike even one of them. Try to aim at them.

Sumitra : What are those five targets ?

Vijaya : Those five targets are non-violence, truth, non-stealth, non-acquisition and celibacy.

Sumitra : [*Laughter*] So these are your five targets. They are invisible. How can one aim at them.

Vijaya : Sumitra! You cannot understand. Any body can aim at a visible object. For aiming at those five invisibles, you require different arrows from a different armoury.

Sumitra : So tell me those different arrows from a different armoury.

Vijaya : They are self-control, renunciation, forgiveness, penitence and austerity.

Sumitra : Where are these arrows available and which manual teaches their use ? Comrade! this is not military science, but an allegory woven by an intellectual. This does not befit us belonging to the warrior-class. It is alright for a Brahmin.

Vijaya : This is not a matter of a Brahmin or a Kshatriya. It is a matter of self-discipline.

Sumitra : The object of a man's creation and existence does not lie in striving for the impossible. If Prince Vardhaman were to ask you to pierce through the seven colours of the rainbow with these five arrows, can you do it ?

Vijaya : Not I. And even if I could, two colours of the rainbow will still remain untouched.

Sumitra : [*Laughter*] Leave it to Prince Vardhaman to shoot at the remaining two. And here comes the Prince.

Vijaya : In sooth, he comes. And now you can enquire from him direct his concept of marksmanship.

[*Sumitra and Vijaya stand alert. Enters Prince Vardhaman—exceedingly handsome, in attractive crimson robe, open locks of hair, bow and arrow in hand, and shoes beaming with precious stones*]

Vijaya & Sumitra : Victory to the Prince !

Vardhaman : Victory to Lord Parshva ! Vijaya, Sumitra ! So both of you have been practising marksmanship. What are the targets you have achieved ?

[*Both remain silent and downcast*]

Vardhaman : Both of you are silent. One can achieve his target even by silence. [*Strolls*] If some one speaks ill of you and you remain silent your quiet composure will tear to bits and leave not a trace of the ill-words spoken.

Sumitra : The arrow to which the Prince is referring is not to be found in any military manual.

Vardhaman : You will find it in the *Dhanurveda* of the Kshatriyas. Do you know the meaning of the word 'Kshatri' ?—he who can save from *Kshati*, from injury. He who saves others from injury is 'Kshatri'.

Sumitra : Then, I take it that for fear of violence, you must never have taken an aim with these mundane arrows.

Vardhaman : Why not ? I am as good a marksman as you are. I have felled many a stump of dead and dry trees. I make my own mounds of earth and aim at them. But the trees of this garden are green. They are pulsating with life. They grow, they blossom, they are fragrant, they bear fruit. How sentient they are. To strike them with arrows is downright violence. That is why I strayed far away from you in search of dry trees.

Vijaya : You go into metaphysical depth of everything.

[*Sudden shouts from side screens : "Run ! Seek shelter ! The elephant from the stable is let loose. There he has crushed to death the old man. Clear off the road. Run ! Help ! Help !"*]

Vardhaman : This a clarion call for help. I shall just now go and find out.

Vijaya : Prince, you need not take the trouble. We shall go and find out. Apparently, an elephant is let loose from the stables. He is trampling down his feet all that comes his way. He might attack you as well.

Vardhaman : It is well he attacks me. That will save others.

Sumitra : That shall never happen, my Liege. Of what use are these bows and arrows if they cannot strike at the head of that rogue.

Vijaya : Ere he tramples men under his feet, I shall break his shin to pieces.

Sumitra : Vijaya ! Here I go right, you go left. We shall attack the rogue from both sides, as soon as he comes in sight.

[*They shift to either side of the screen and fix their arrows to the strings*]

Vardhaman : Tarry, thou shalt not aim at a creature alive.

Sumitra : But that elephant is a rogue. He has gone amuck. He will take many more lives.

Vijaya : If one life preys on other lives, there is no harm in taking away that life. To do a great right, do a little wrong.

Vardhaman : But one life is as precious as another. Both of you stay back. I shall personally go and meet the elephant.

Sumitra : We cannot leave you alone. We shall accompany you.

Vardhaman : No, you must stay back. You might act indiscreetly in temper. It is best I go alone.

Vijaya : For heavens sake stop. You shall not go alone.

Vardhaman : No, go I must and that too alone.

Vijaya : The elephant has gone amuck ; he is bound to attack you.

Vardhaman : He is welcome. But you will not move from here. These are my orders, my command. Here I go. [*Exit*]

Vijaya : So there he goes and we are forbidden to accompany him. I fear some evil in the offing.

Sumitra : This is foolhardiness in the Prince. A mad elephant draws no distinction between a prince and a commoner. And how can the Prince face the elephant, when he is determined not to kill.

Vijaya : Needlessly, we have been stopped. We have missed a golden opportunity to display our skill in marksmanship.

Sumitra : I have never missed my aim. My arrows only know the bull's eye and not the magpie.

Vijaya : All this is alright. But the wonder of wonders is how did the elephant escape from the stable. Could not the *Mahout* hold him ?

Sumitra : The *Mahout* was careless, or else he could not chain the elephant with his best efforts. Now let us see how the Prince holds the elephant.

Vijaya : How can the Prince stop the elephant without the use of the bow and arrow ?

Sumitra : [*Laughter*] Must he use your bow and arrow ? He has finer weapons in his armoury. The arrow you use must kill ; and killing to him is biggest violence.

Vijaya : [*Pensive*] Violence or no violence, it will be hell to us if the elephant attacks the Prince in rage.

Sumitra : [*Casually*] At worst we shall be imprisoned by King Siddhartha for the unpardonable offence of leaving the Prince alone unprotected.

Vijaya : Why should we be imprisoned ? We were all the time willing to accompany the Prince. It is he who held us back.

Sumitra : Our offence is we let the Prince go to face the elephant. We were duty bound to stop him.

Vijaya : I did stop him, but he paid no heed to me. On the contrary, he welcomed an attack by the elephant.

Sumitra : Whatever will be, will be. But the leaving of the Prince alone unarmed is not good. He saw danger in our accompanying him, but we sense danger in *not* accompanying him.

Vijaya : Now nothing can be done. May Lord Parshvanath protect us. How well it might have been had we accompanied the Prince. If the elephant attacked him, we could protect him and win our reward.

Sumitra : As body-guards, it is our duty to protect the Prince. What matters is the loss of opportunity to win the applause of public as great heroes and protector of the people.

Vijaya : Never again will come this opportunity to excel as archers. [*Sighs*]

[*Voices from behind the screen : "Glory to Prince Vardhaman ! Victory to the Prince ! Hail Vardhaman !*"]

Vijaya : Wherefrom these sounds of Victory ?

Sumitra : Why, glory unto Vardhaman ? On one side the elephant is mercilessly crushing unarmed people ; and on the other they are singing halleluiahs.

Vijaya : It is all a conundrum.

Sumitra : Let us come and find out the actual position.

Vijaya : Happy tidings are in store. Let us join the chore.

[*As they are about to start, two citizens enter*]

1st Citizen : Our salutations unto you. You appear to be comrades of Prince Vardhaman.

Sumitra : So it is. But where is Prince Vardhaman ?

2nd Citizen : He is in the crowd. And flowers are being showered on him from all sides.

Vijaya : Flowers ? How ? Why ? And where is the elephant ?

Sumitra : Yes, that mad elephant that had lost its moorings and was crushing people here and there.

1st Citizen : That same elephant has been tamed by the Prince.

Sumitra : How ! Did the Prince use his bow and arrow ?

2nd Citizen : The Prince did have the bow and arrow but those he handed over to me. He faced the elephant unarmed.

Vijaya : How did the elephant then react ?

Sumitra : Surely he must be coming in full fury.

1st Citizen : Yes, like a whirlwind, like a cloud-burst. The earth was trembling under his feet. His eyes were bloodshot and shining like embers. He was uprooting trees, as a magnet would pull out a billet.

Vijaya : Verily, it required great courage to face such a deadly rogue.

2nd Citizen : Yes, the Prince had great courage and there was magnetic attraction in his eyes.

1st Citizen : Gentlemen, the Prince spread his hands wide open and stood plump in front of the elephant. As soon as the elephant spread his trunk in rage, the Prince caught hold of it, used it as a spring-board and in the twinkling of an eye, he was on the forehead of the elephant. I don't know how the Prince tickled the ears of the elephant that the once mad became at once tame.

Sumitra : Tamed ! Wonder of the wonders.

2nd Citizen : Not only the elephant was quiet, but he lifted his trunk in respectful obeisance.

Vijaya : Doubtless, the Prince is a man of great power and courage.

1st Citizen : It is not power and couarge alone. There is some light divine in him. The most ferocious mellows down in his presence.

2nd Citizen : I feel that all that fury of the elephant was his deep yearning to have the Prince ride him. Once the Prince was on his back, the elephant was absolutely quiet.

Sumitra : On the contrary, both of us were worried lest that elephant should attack the Prince.

Vijaya : We were keen to accompany the Prince for his safety. But he forbade us and left alone post-haste.



Spread his hands wide open and stood plump in front of the elephant. *p. 40*

1st Citizen : He needs no protection. He can face a thousand elephants alone.

Sumitra : Where is that elephant now ?

2nd Citizen : The Prince has directed the elephant back to the stable. As soon as he was quiet, the *Mahout* came running for him. The Prince alighted from the elephant and handed him over to the *Mahout*. And the citizens began to chant encomiums and shower flowers on the Prince.

1st Citizen : Soon after getting down from the elephant, the Prince ordered the Mayor to attend to the injured.

Vijaya : Verily, the Prince is jewel of a man.

2nd Citizen : He stopped that shower of flowers and told the people that it is far more meritorious to serve the cripple and the injured, than to sprinkle flowers on him.

Sumitra : Where is the Prince right now ?

2nd Citizen : He must be here anon. He told us that his two friends Sumitra and Vijaya must be waiting for him. So you are those two friends of the Prince.

Vijaya : That is our good fortune. There stands Sumitra and here I am Vijaya. We thank you for the happy tidings you have brought unto us.

1st Citizen : *Au Revoir !* We have to attend to the injured.

2nd Citizen : Among the injured is my enemy. But once he has been trampled by the elephant, the Prince told me that it was now my duty to attend to him first.

1st Citizen : So let us leave.

2nd Citizen : We beg leave of you.

Both : Victory to Vardhaman ! [*Exeunt*]

Sumitra : These two citizens brought good news. But it is still a marvel, how Prince Vardhaman tamed that mad elephant unarmed.

Vijaya : Marvel it is. A common man would lose his balance in such a situation. But the Prince tamed the wild elephant in a trice. The Prince is surely endowed with supernatural powers.

Sumitra : Surely he is brave. The news of his valour will please King Siddhartha immensely.

Vijaya : So let us be the messengers of this happy tiding.

Sumitra : The King must have already got the news by now. All the same, let us go and share his rejoicing. But here comes the Prince himself.

Vijaya : We have no flowers to offer. We can only courtesy.

Sumitra : Glory be to Vardhaman !

Vijaya : Glory be to his deeds of valour !

Vardhaman : What is so great about it, Vijaya. It is more difficult to conquer one's self. Once you have conquered the self, you can conquer every thing else in the world.

Sumitra : You practise what you preach. Just now two citizens came. They told us that you tamed the wild elephant unarmed. You handed over your bow and arrow to them and faced the elephant single-handed. Nothing upsets you.

Vardhaman : He who believes in self, need fear nothing. He who fears, is ignorant of his own strength.

Vijaya : So, you tamed the elephant without an attack.

Vardhaman : Vijaya ! If a man is non-violent in thought, word and deed he can control anybody. In fact, everybody is in love with his own self. In search of happiness, he tries to fly away from misery. But he who knows suffering, can alone feel the sorrow of another. And he who shares another's sorrow, can alone know the depth of his own suffering. Therefore, he alone has the right to live, who does not cause pain to others, gives injury to none. None but those who can remove suffering, are brave !

Vijaya : Prince, you know other peoples' suffering; and, therefore, you are brave.

Sumitra : So, from to-day Prince Vardhaman will be called Vardhaman, the Brave.

Vijaya : I agree with you, Sumitra! Our Prince is Vardhaman, the Brave.

Sumitra : Let's go. King Siddhartha must be waiting for Vardhaman, the Brave. The courtiers must have by now informed him how the Prince tamed the wild elephant unarmed. Truly, he is brave!

Vijaya : Prince, let us go.

[*They are about to leave, but Vijaya suddenly stops, looking at a tree*]

Vijaya : Look there.

Sumitra : Why, what's there?

Vijaya : Look, at the root of that tree.

Sumitra : Oh, what a deadly snake It's a big cobra. Vijaya! keep back.

Vardhaman : Vijaya, why are you stepping back? Wait and watch, whither goes the snake.

Vijaya : Where will it go? It is coming straight to bite us.

Sumitra : How wide he has spread his hood. Prince, you will excuse me this time. I must strike at his hood with my arrow.

Vijaya : And if you miss your aim, the snake will jump at you so swiftly, that you will find no way to escape.

Sumitra : Vijaya, you know very well that I never miss my aim. No violence is involved in killing him, who kills others. Prince will excuse me, here I go. [*Fixes his arrow to the bow and stretches the string*]

Vardhaman : Sumitra, Don't strike him with your arrow. You are safe even without your arrow. You are needlessly afraid. I will remove the snake from your path. [*Steps forward, catches the snake by the tail, and throws him far away behind the screen*]

Sumitra : Tarry, Prince! He will bite you. Has he bitten you ?

Vijaya : What, has the Prince been bitten ?

Vardhaman : Why should he bite me ? I bear no ill-will towards him. I am neither afraid of him nor am I angry with him.

Sumitra : Truly Prince, you have lot of courage in your breast.

Vijaya : This is real bravery. Sumitra, first you called the Prince "Vardhaman, the Brave". And now I call him "Vardhaman, the very Brave".

Sumitra : Yes, truly, Mahavira Vardhaman.

Both : Glory unto Mahavira Vardhaman !

[*They bow to Vardhaman. Vardhaman stands serene*]

[*Curtain*]

Act II

[Place : The Assembly Hall of King Siddhartha. Time : Afternoon. Direction : Richly-decorated Assembly Hall. A big portrait of Lord Parshvanath on the front wall. On the sides life-size statues. Golden throne in the centre, with frills of pearl. Footrests of brocade. Velvet carpet on the floor. Entire hall fragrant with incense of sandal and camphor.

King Siddhartha is about fifty—broad forehead and acquiline nose. He is in his regalia, with a crown on his head and shoes studded with precious stones. The king is pacing up and down and his lips are quivering with rage. Commander-in-Chief Girisen is facing him like a culprit. The King shouts aloud]

Siddhartha : Girisen, please let me know how did our best elephant escape from the stable. How did he break open the iron chains round his feet ? What were the guard, the gateman and the Mayor doing ? Were they merrily watching on the mall, while the elephant crushed my people under his feet.

Girisen : My Lord, the head-keeper was on his guard, but...

Siddhartha : What guard ! What do you mean by watch-and-ward if mishaps continue to happen and the Mayor can not bring them under control. There is cloud-burst and the lightning strikes the earth. Is that your concept of security ?

Girisen : Pardon me, my Lord !. The head-keeper was giving a bath to the elephant.

Siddhartha : What sort of bath was that, so that the elephant should give a blood-bath to my innocent subject.

Girisen : My Lord, there was no such possibility. But an arrow from an unknown direction struck the elephant. The animal got agitated and ran off in one direction. The best efforts of the *Mahout* could not stop him. He ran post-haste due north.

Siddhartha : And where was the Mayor ?

Girisen : He was guarding the play-ground of Prince Vardhaman.

Siddhartha : Fine, the Mayor was guarding the play-ground there ; and carnage was going on here.

Girisen : Not much damage done. The guards drifted the course of the elephant from the mall to a lonely path.

[*Shouts from behind the screen : "Victory unto Vardhaman! Hail, Prince Vardhaman !"*]

Siddhartha : What are these clarion calls of victory ?

Girisen : I shall find out anon. [*Exit*]

Siddhartha : [*Aside*] The elephant is trampling the people and they are singing praises to Vardhaman. When the Prince was born, prosperity dawned on the kingdom ; and now it is in the grip of an adversity.

[*Re-enter Girisen*]

Girisen : Glory be to the Lord. Prince Vardhaman has brought the elephant under control.

Siddhartha : [*In surprise*] How, how did it happen. How could the Prince control that mighty elephant.

Girisen : That, I cannot answer. But I have heard people say that the Prince *did* bring the elephant under control, handed it over to the *Mahout*, and directed it back to the stables.

Siddhartha : [*Pleased*] Well said, the elephant is back to the stables. [*Aside*] But how did the Prince reach there, when he was practising marksmanship in the play-ground. I hope he is not hurt. [*To Girisen*] Please find out the full facts.

Girisen : So be it. [*Exit*]

Siddhartha : An elephant let loose is terribly dangerous and ferocious. And yet they say the Prince brought him under control. But how, how can that be.

[*Enter Guard*]

Guard : Sire, Princes Vijaya and Sumitra seek your audience.

Siddhartha : Prince Vardhaman and they were together busy at target-shooting. Let them in. They will be able to give true and correct facts.

Guard : As you order, Sir. [*Exit*]

Siddhartha : Vijaya and Sumitra were at the Range with Prince Vardhaman since the morning. They are always with the Prince. And surely they must have assisted the Prince in taming the elephant. An elephant run amuck cannot possibly be controlled by one single man, especially when that man is of age so tender as Prince Vardhaman.

[*Enter Vijaya and Sumitra*]

Both : Long live the King!

Siddhartha : Vijaya and Sumitra, where is the Prince ?

Vijaya : What, has he not arrived here as yet ?

Siddhartha : Where is he ? I am told he has tamed that mad elephant.

Sumitra : Not only the elephant but also the king Cobra.

Siddhartha : The serpent also ? Where was this snake. You are telling me strange things. A deadly snake and a mad elephant,—both brought under control by the young Prince !

Vijaya : Yes, my Lord. The Prince did tame the serpent too.

Sumitra : He is not Prince Vardhaman. He is Vardhaman, the Brave.

Vijaya : My Lord ! When the elephant was coming in its full fury, the Prince stood in front of him, with his hands spread wide.

Siddhartha : What, the Prince stood plump in front of the elephant unarmed ?

Vijaya : Yes, so it was. When the elephant trumpeted and threw its trunk at him, the Prince laughed at the elephant's rage. In a flash, the Prince put his foot on the trunk and in the next moment he was on the brow of the elephant. Then he had a firm hold on its neck with both his feet. After that he tickled the beast mysteriously behind the lobes of his ear. And by a magic spell, the elephant which shook like an earthquake stood still like a rock.

Sumitra : And in that very silent posture, the elephant raised his trunk in respectful obeisance to the Prince.

Siddhartha : I am proud of my son, Vardhaman.

Vijaya : While the elephant held his trunk aloft in respectful salutation, the *Mahout* came running behind. The Prince handed over the elephant to him and joined us again.

Sumitra : And then when we were coming over to you, a deadly snake sprang at us from the trunk of a Baniyan-tree. We got terrified but the Prince stood calm. He caught hold of the snake by his tail and threw him hastily far away. There is some divine spark in the Prince so that the most ferocious creatures become inert in his presence.

Siddhartha : This is all the blessing of Lord Parshvanath. The divine spark in the Prince comes from the Lord. But where is the Prince at present.

Vijaya : We thought he was already with you.

Siddhartha : No, he has not come here as yet. He is so humble that he never extols his deeds nor does he want to hear words of praises for self. This worries me constantly.

Sumitra : The Prince must be in his own apartment. Shall we send him on to you ? Even after performing the most valiant act, the Prince remains so passionless and contented. When people were shouting praises for him, the Prince did not even smile.

Siddhartha : Yes, do send the Prince. I want to meet him. But before you leave, take your reward for the good news you have brought. [*Takes off a pearl-necklace from his neck*]

Vijaya : My Lord, don't bother about presents.

Sumitra : Our biggest reward is that we have the good fortune of being comrades-in-arm of the illustrious Prince.

Siddhartha : That may be so. But it is my wish and desire that you do accept a gift from me. [*Offers a pearl necklace to each of them*]

Both : Long live the King ! Long live the Prince ! [*Exeunt*]

Siddhartha : What great news of the valour of my son. So my prince is now called Vardhaman, the Brave. I do not know whether the Queen is aware of this. Vardhaman may be "Brave" for his people, but he is still the delicate darling of his mother. What, ho, sirrah !

[*Enter attendant*]

Attendant : Here, sweet Lord, at your service.

Siddhartha : Go, call Queen Trishala.

Attendant : As you order, sir. [*Exit*]

Siddhartha : [Bowing with folded hands before the portrait of Parshvanath] O, Lord Parshva ! It is by your grace that I am the fortunate father of such an illustrious son. There is no comparison between a young prince and an elephant as mighty as Indra's *Airavata*. And yet the Prince did tame the elephant and threw the king Cobra into thin air as lightly as petals of flower. All this happened Lord Parshvanath, by your grace abounding.

[*Enter Queen Trishala*]

Trishala : Hail, my Lord!

Siddhartha : O Trishala! Have you heard the latest. Have you heard of the deeds of valour performed by your young little son. He has tamed a wild elephant that ran amuck and he threw overhead a mighty serpent so lustily that it pulverised in thin air.

Trishala : Yes, my Lord, anon I got these news. But where is the Prince? I thought he was with you. I was just coming to you when I got your message.

Siddhartha : The Prince has not yet arrived here. I am as keen to meet him as you are.

Trishala : I wonder where he has lingered. People must have mobbed him. I fear some one may cast an evil eye on his brave deeds.

Siddhartha : Such fears are common to the tender bosom of a mother. But our Prince is so much loved by our people, that you will not find a single soul in the entire kingdom of Vaishali who could cast an evil eye on the Prince. It is just the otherwise. Wherever the Prince casts his glance, ill omens become propitious, poison changes to nectar, fury to peace.

Trishala : This I knew the very moment the Prince was born. Before his birth, I had dreamt sixteen dreams. And in the dreams, I saw a lion, a tiger, a bull, anointment of goddess of wealth, etc. Your royal astrologer had interpreted the dreams and had predicted that my son will be very brave and pious.

Siddhartha : Yes, I remember what the astrologer had said. He had also predicted that our son will win universal love and universal fame. Prosperity dawned on our kingdom soon after his birth; and that is why I named him "Vardhaman".

Trishala : Then I take it that his progeny will multiply as his name warrants.

Siddhartha : Surely, there can be no doubt in that.

Trishala : But I have my grave doubts.

Siddhartha : Why these doubts. Are you worried about his marriage?

Trishala : Yes, I have been thinking of his marriage since long. But...

Siddhartha : What, but...

Trishala : The Prince is not matrimonially inclined. He wants to be left alone. I have often found him pensive. Whenever, I broach the topic of marriage to him, he quietly slinks away.

Siddhartha : His friends have also told me so. They say he never looks at a damsel.

Trishala : My maternal instinct takes me into flights of imagination. When I close my eyelids, myriad damsels dance before my eyes eager to be daughters-in-law. But all those fair images evaporate like camphor before the anchorite look of the Prince.

Siddhartha : Many a king have sent to me the portraits of their daughters. And I have passed on all those paintings to the Prince, but I never got any response from him. It is like the sweet melody of music lost in the distance and never sending its echo back.

Trishala : My motherly affections have become evanescent like the rainbow. [*Sighs*]

[*Enter Prince Vardhaman in a pensive mood*]

Vardhaman : I bow down to my parents.

Siddhartha : May you be ever victorious.

Trishala : Come, my darling ! Come nearer to me. May you be always happy. I have just heard that you have tamed a wild elephant and hurled a deadly reptile.

Siddhartha : The entire Kundagram is all praise for your bravery. Our dynasty has not produced a Prince so brave as you are.

Trishala : My Prince charming will dazzle the whole world by his deeds.

Vardhaman : This over estimation is bursting out of maternal love.

Siddhartha : Your comrades were all praise for your intrepidity. For them you are no longer Prince Vardhaman, but Vardhaman the Brave.

Vardhaman : This is all due to your blessings, father.

Trishala : I hope you are not hurt.

Vardhaman : The armour of your blessings constantly protects my body.

Siddhartha : I am proud of you, my son. For your safety and prosperity, let us go and worship Lord Parshvanath.

Vardhaman : So be it.

[*Curtain*]



The entire Kundagram is all praise for your bravery. p. 52

Sunita : Her head is drawn in like a tortoise, and her eyes are drooping low.

Trishala : She should not look down to the ground, but high up to the palaces. [*Picks up another painting*] Let that go. This other is the Princess of Malava.

Sunita : She is all set for a wrestling bout. If she enters our harems, she will convert them into fighting arenas.

Trishala : My son always talks of renunciation. What possible interest can he have in wrestling. It is a different matter, that he tamed a wild elephant. Now look at this third painting—the Princess from Avanti.

Sunita : Quite pretty. But her beauty is only skin-deep. It does not bring out her real self. She may be propitious for her kingdom, but may bring the downfall of ours.

Trishala : Out of the three, she is best. Alright, have a look at this fourth one. She is the daughter of the king of Kukkuta.

Sunita : Kukkuta is a cock. She is in search of Cockerel-seed. She better be a courtezan.

Trishala : Sunita, be discreet in your expression. Talking of courtezan in an ensemble of princesses of royal blood. Alright, I take you to a fifth one from Champa.

Sunita : This is the right stuff. Her nose is aquiline. There is modesty in her eyes and honey-dew on her lips.

Trishala : Alright, I keep this port. But how about this Princess from Mandaleshvar.

Sunita : She is also good. You may sort her out also. The halo round her face puts her at par with Jayanti, the daughter of Indra. She is verily a goddess among mankind.

Trishala : Here goes she among the select. But I would like you to consider also the Princess from Kalinga, the daughter of Shatrujit.



Aha, she is princes inter paribas. A new moon will grow into full moon by the radiance of her beauty. *p. 55*

Sunita : Aha, she is *princes inter paribus.* A new moon will grow into full moon by the radiance of her beauty. Her eyes are attractive like the white lotus. A little smile on her lips gives an impression of laughter making its retreat from her mouth. The Princess of Kalinga is in all ways suited for our Prince Vardhaman.

Trishala : I entirely agree with you. Early morning I gazed intently at the portrait of this Princess. It appeared that the glow of the morning radiated from her picture. Her hair have been washed by the waves on the shores of Kalinga. The moon pales before the radiance of her forehead. The parting line of her nose bends like the horizon. Her eyes are soft as the petals of a half-blown lotus. By all standards, this girl deserves to be my daughter-in-law. Her name is inscribed below her portrait. It is *Ya-sho-da.* Being daughter of Kalinga, she has gathered in her all the power and glory of the kingdom of Shurasena.

[*Enter Prince Vardhaman*]

Sunita : Long live the Prince.

Trishala : Welcome, my son. We were just talking about you.

Vardhaman : But I heard about the excellent beauty of the entire kingdom of Shurasena centered in one.

Trishala : So you have already overheard us. In my creeper of today, there is the blossom of future. And in that blossom—beauty, colour and fragrance smile forth together.

Vardhaman : Mother, you are talking poetry. Please come out in plain prose.

Trishala : You are so erudite that you can read out the language of the birds and the beast. Is my language of poetry more difficult than that. I want to decorate my dressing room with a portrait out of these, which you consider best.

Vardhaman : Your dressing room is already so well decorated that there is no space for further portraits.

Trishala : Sunita ! You go. I want to talk to my son alone.

Sunita : As you order, Madam ! [*Exit*]

Vardhaman : Why have you turned out Sunita ?

Trishala : Servant-maids have no right to hear mother and son talk.

Vardhaman : Mother, what is so special in that talk.

Trishala : You shall know it presently.

Vardhaman : You were just talking about portraits.

Trishala : Yes, the portrait I was talking about will be more beautiful and attracting than all the paintings hanging here. Above all it will be a live portrait, to the sound of whose music this entire room will resound.

Vardhaman : Now, I get it. But, mother, none of these paintings are everlasting. All of them are bound to decay one day. And the human form divine loses its shape and colour faster than any painting does.

Trishala : These talks of renunciation ill-befit my dressing room. It is like a serpent come to abide in a vanity-box.

Vardhaman : This human body is also described as tabernacle. But this receptacle is the abode of five serpents represented by our five senses.

Trishala : Your learning has become the air of the recluse which rises up to the throat. Time will come for renunciation. But dawn will remain dawn. To think of midday sun in early morning, is a travesty of time.

Vardhaman : Eternal truth is beyond all limitations of time.

Trishala : I am not here to enter into any polemics with you. I speak the language of maternal love and ardent desire.

I want the silent corners of my chamber to be resonant with the sound of music coming from the nimble feet of some pretty maid.

Vadhaman : Mother, the stream of your affections is gentle and ever-flowing. But your cravings are endless. They feed on what they get.

Trishala : It is these desires and cravings that keep this world going. [*Picks up Yashoda's portrait*] Now look at this, portrait. I like it best. How beautiful are her eyes, like two flowers in the hands of cupid. Her nose is so aquiline like a boundary-line drawn up. Her lips are like two sweet banks betwixt which flows the stream of speech. In her temperament, disposition and behaviour, she appears to be Indrani. You wanted to know in whom the entire excellence of Shurasena kingdom had collected. It is this daughter of Kalinga. Her name is Yashoda. I want you to be married to her.

[*Vardhaman keeps quiet*]

Trishala : Today, I am pouring forth before you, my year's pent-up longings.

[*Vardhaman is still silent*]

Trishala : Why keep so mum, my son. Your silence is a challenge to your mother's affections.

Vardhaman : Mother, are your affections so cheap as to be a flower on the wedding-altar. There are many flowers in the wreath of your affection. Why attach so much importance to this one single flower ?

Trishala : All flowers in a mother's love are alike. But each flower has its individual importance. Wedlock is that flower that lends colour and beauty to the entire garland.

Vardhaman : May the flowers of your love and affection spread far and wide. Do not tie them to a string.

Trishala : What do you mean ?

Vardhaman : If I do not marry, the world will none be poorer for it.

Trishala : The world will not be poorer, but I shall be. I am sure my son will not put me to a loss.

Vardhaman : I can never put you to a loss. But I see no profit and loss in this.

Trishala : You are not a mother ; and so you cannot visualise the yearning for a daughter-in-law. All your colleagues have got married. Their mothers have got the daughters-in-law of their choice. Their mansions are resonant with splendour and merriment ; while our palace is cold and desolate like winter. You should have been long married. The delay was because hitherto I could not find an appropriate daughter-in-law. But now that I have found a bride beautiful, modest and befitting you, you say you do not want to marry.

Vardhaman : Yes, mother, I do not want to marry.

Trishala : Then, how shall our royal dynasty continue.

Vardhaman : I have my elder brother Nandivardhan, I have my sister Sudarshana ; I have my uncle Suparshva. They are all there to continue the royal dynasty. And my own father is like the ever-green Champaka tree, resplendent in his glory.

Trishala : The tree of trumpet flowers is not known by one or two flowers. It is when every branch blossoms forth that the tree becomes flaming-red.

Vardhaman : The verdure of the tree is temporary. I am not impressed by such transient beauty. This splendour slowly fades away like the waning glory of the moon in the dark-half.

Trishala : Your learning is as remote from my affections as the earth is from the sky. My son, you can never comprehend the maternal instinct.

Vadhaman : Instincts are constantly changing. Death grabs us like the mightly waves of the ocean. And the men at the

shore watch helplessly. Our resolutions and firm determination should count far more than influences of previous birth.

Trishala : So you are determined not to marry.

Vardhaman : Yes, I do not want to marry. As a charioteer has full control of his horses, my inclinations are in my control. My desires are unwavering, without pride and without the inflow of *Karmas*. Like stars in the night, different kinds of attractions allure us. I do not want to be caught napping. I am awake and alert against all temptations.

Trishala : While you wake, I want to sleep. Those stars in the spacious firmament are my dreams. I spent my nights in dreams. You insult me by calling me a dreamer.

Vardhaman : Respect and insult are like heat and cold. They are insubstantial like straw. They are perversions of the mind. We must dedicate our life for the common weal.

Trishala : Do you doubt that ours is not a welfare state. You are well aware of the administration in the state. There is peace all round ; people are content ; there are all conveniences in the palace ; above all, there is constant worship of Lord Parshvanath. What more do you expect in a welfare state. But your norms are different. I have never been able to fathom your thoughts. My only consolation is that I have the proud privilege of being your mother. For years I have been looking forward to your marriage. There are so many girls pretty from top to bottom, well-versed in all respects, yearning to serve you. And Yashoda excels them all. In her grace, charm and modesty, she surpasses even Rati, the consort of Cupid. Do gratify her by accepting her as your bride.

Vardhaman : Leave Yashoda apart. Even if Rati herself were to propose, I would not accept her. This is my final resolve. I am helpless. My resolve is flouting your orders. Like a smell-less flower, your wish is withering under the hot blast of my resolve. I seek your forgiveness. Please do forgive me, mother !

Trishala : A mother can always forgive, whenever the son goes amiss. My days are numbered. It was my great desire to see my son being garlanded by a bride, my courtyard being decorated by auspicious jars. The streets of Kundagram being lighted with lamps and the whole city wearing a festive look with multicoloured festoons and buntings all over. The ladies of the household would have watched the wedding-procession of my son from the balconies. But all this was not be. It was an eerie dream. I must carry to my grave my pent-up yarnings. [*Covers her face in her raiments and sobs in tears*]

[*Voices from inside : "Long Live the King ! Victory to our King ! Hail, King Siddhartha !"*]

Vardhaman : Mummy, father is coming this side. Put up on your best appearances.

[*Enter King Siddhartha*]

Siddhartha : Hullo, both mother and son are here. But, my dear queen, why these tears in your eyes ?

Vardhaman : Father, I have insulted mummy.

Siddhartha : You cannot possibly insult your mother, even in your dreams. Something else has transpired. I would like to hear from your mother.

Vardhaman : Mother was discussing about my marriage but I declined the offer. That is how I have insulted my mother. I crave your indulgence, father. I also solicit my mother's forgiveness.

Siddhartha : Trishala, you are worked up, you are very much agitated. Retire to your bed-room and rest. I shall talk to Vardhaman alone.

[*Exit Trishala, weeping and sobbing*]

Siddhartha : So, you have refused to marry. You cannot fathom mother's love for her progeny. Mother's heart is

like a tank in which blossoms forth the lotus of fondness. If hot winds wither the lotus flowers, the loveliness of the tank is gone. You are so well-versed ; can your learning not divine the mother's love.

[*Vardhaman is quiet with head held low*]

Siddhartha : Why don't you speak. In our royal family, it is customary to marry. Best bride is selected for the eligible bachelor. On the basis of purity of blood, comeliness, decorum and natural disposition two different families unite in a matrimonial alliance and their redoubled renown spreads far and wide like the fragrance of spring. Wife and husband build a universe of their own, which excels even the heavens above. Out of the four religious orders, that of the householder's has been considered best.

Vardhaman : Father, what you say is based on polity and accepted norms. But I cannot help my own inclinations.

Siddhartha : Inclinations should be guided by reason. God has given you the faculty to think and reason out so that you may not be lead away by emotions. Of late I am noticing a contra trend in you. You are only twenty, but you simulate actions of a centenarian. You look even older than me.

Vardhaman : None is older than you ; Not even Indra.

Siddhartha : Indra may not be older than me, but you surely are. So many kingdoms have sent proposals for your marriage, but looking to your ways I have not been able to send reply to any of them.

Vardhaman : If you care to listen to me, you better not reply to any of them.

Siddhartha : Why should I not reply ? You are a prince, you are brave, you are wise, you are handsome, you are going to succeed to the throne.

Vardhaman : I do not want to inherit this kingdom ; I want to be heir to 'Salvation'.

Siddhartha : There is enough time to achieve 'Salvation'. First do your duty to this world, and then you can renounce it. Our first Tirthankara, Adinath did the same. He married Sunanda and Sumangala. He had several sons and daughters. He reigned for several years; and thereafter he became a recluse. Similarly, you can also renounce the world after you have completed the householder's *Dharma.*

Vardhaman : Father, your arguments are irrefutable. I can only say that the times of Adinath were different. We have now neither that longevity, nor that body-figure nor that manly vigour. We are pigmies before Adinath.

Siddhartha : I have full confidence in your manly vigour. I can never forget the day when you stood in front of that wild elephant and by a single gaze you melted all his pride and power. That speaks volumes of your manliness.

Vardhaman : I do not consider this to be my victory. The day of my victory would be when I can completely stop the inflow of *Karmas.* I want to surmount an entirely different elephant—an elephant whose legs are modesty, non-violence, renunciation and vigilance; whose trunk is reverence; whose tusks are indifference, whose neck is the code of law; whose head is wisdom and whose tail is discretion.

Siddhartha : Amen! So be it! You will be able to ride such an elephant only after you have conquered the ego, the frailties and the desires to which this flesh is heir. This will take time. In the mean while, I want you to marry and do your duty to our royal family, protect and look after your subject.

Vardhaman : Father, I have no right to go against your mandate, but in my humble opinion it is far nobler to think of the welfare of mankind as a whole than of one's subject only. These days the mockery of caste-system is crushing the entire humanity and the untouchables are being treated like animals. There is so much of killing in the name of religion and so many animals are sacrificed

in the *Yajnas*, that streams of blood have turned the waters of river red. So many skins of dead animals were thrown in a river that its name was changed to 'Charmavati'. The entire atmosphere is polluted by incense rising from the burning of animal flesh.

Siddhartha : My son, every word of what you say is true.

Vardhaman : Then confine me not to the four walls of this palace. Let me go out to practise the Religion of Mankind. I do not find anywhere that non-violence which our Lord Parshvanath preached. Vedic religion has transformed itself into a cult of violence. What are these Ashvamedha and Gomedha sacrifices. They are mere media for utter violence and meat-eating. The Vedic hymns have become the play-balls of the high-priests who preside over the *Yajnas*. They loudly waft the *Mantras* in the air, as a player would swing his ball, The Vedic *Mantras* are veritable balls inflated with the air of conceit. The high-priests who perform animal sacrifices loudly proclaim that this is not killing—this is not violence ! But I can see with naked eyes how many innocent and unsuspecting animals are being mercilessly butchered every day. The plaintive wail of the animals on the sacrificial altar is heart-rending. Those animals are calling me for their protection.

Siddhartha : Such is the state of affairs. Sometimes I feel that even the gods who are invoked at these sacrifices have turned carnivorous and quench their thirst by blood alone. The priests address their god as the Creator. What sort of Creator is this, who revels in feeding on the blood of his own children.

Vardhaman : Father, I am glad that you appreciate the truth. Mankind has cut asunder one of its limbs and calls it the 'Untouchable'. I fail to understand how the untouchables are in anyway different from us. Their limbs are like ours ; they experience sorrow and joy, love and hatred, fear and courage, like any one of us. And yet they have been deprived of elementary civic rights. They cannot mix with us, sit with us, talk to us or laugh with us. If an untouchable cites the Vedic *Mantra*, his tongue

is cut. If his shadow falls on a Brahmin, he is at once cut to pieces.

Siddhartha : Indeed, it is a lamentabe state of affairs. But we do not behave with our subjects like that.

Vardhaman : We might be treating our subjects better, but our subjects do not constitute the entire humanity. People have these days forgotten their civic duties. The precious jewel of 'truth' is cast aside, while they are busy collecting imitation glass of 'falsehood'. Selfishness has strangled altruism. The master treats his servants like chattels. If they can not earn for their master, they are subjected to physical tortures. The lot of women is even worse. Their husband treat them like bought slaves. If I marry, I shall protect only one woman, unmarried I can be the saviour of entire womanhood. I shall narrow my outlook by being tied down to one woman.

Siddhartha : Here I do not agree with you. A single wave breaking at the shore, is not the end of the numerous waves rising on the high seas. You shall be like the mighty ocean. By imbibing one wave unto you, you shall attract thousands of more waves to the shore.

Vardhaman : But this will not end my karmic bondage. I want to do penance to shed off all karmic bondage. And this will be possible only when I leave this palace. I shall gather strength from the forces of nature. The free air that pervades the entire cosmos, will bring to me the message of universal love. And it is this universal love alone that can be the saviour of humanity.

Siddhartha : So I take it that you will not marry and you will also leave this palace.

Vardhaman : I await your sanction.

Siddhartha : I do not know what to tell to those kings who daily wait on me, with proposals for your marriage. What should I tell to my subjects, who are eagerly looking forward to their welfare under your benign regime.

What should I tell to goddess Lakshmi who is itching to coronate you with the royal crown. I am in the sunset of my life, and am becoming weak and feeble. Don't you think that it is the moral duty of a son to support his old father.

[*Vardhaman is quiet*]

Siddhartha : My son, why don't you speak ? Will not our subject follow the path of rectitude under the leadership of a king so righteous as you. Will not all the ills of our kingdom end under your statesmanship. Can anybody possibly suffer in your reign ? You can declare non-violence as the national creed. By your prowess you can crush all your enemies and can protect not only your subject but mankind as a whole. By making the world happy, you can make yourself also happy and content.

Vardhaman : But the happiness which comes out of practising austerity far exceeds the happiness which comes out of ruling over a country. Royalty may breed enmity and malice ; but asceticism breeds amity and friendliness alike towards the lion and the cow, the snake and the mongoose, the cat and the mouse. A recluse is in constant enjoyment of inner happiness—neither perturbed by desires nor worked up by malice !

Siddhartha : There can be no two opinions that penance is the highest form of accomplishment. I do want you to practise penance and derive the pleasure born of it. But Lord Parshvanath first practised the householder's *Dharma* for thirty years, then he spent the next seventy years as an ascetic, doing good to humanity. And then at the age of hundred he obtained *Nirvana* in deep meditation at Sammet Shikhar. So do I wish you to obtain salvation after lot of penance and austerity. But all this should follow after you have reigned over your kingdom for a few years. While you reign, you will acquaint yourself better with human nature, human conduct and human behaviour. This understanding will help you in finding your own way for human salvation. Above all, it is my ardent wish that you should be

the symbol of the glory of our dynasty as I have been in my times by following the path of rectitude set out for us by Lord Parshvanath. You are yet not a father and therefore you cannot gauge the aspirations of a father. Your mother has selected a princess befitting you. Her name is Yashoda ; and she is in every way fit to be the queen-consort. You are quite learned and you very well know that causing pain to your mother's heart is a great *Himsa*. You are a great devotee of non-violence ; and none should know better than you that the stream of motherly love satiates all like the waters of Gandak flowing through our kingdom.

[*Sounds of commotion behind the screen*]

Siddhartha : How comes this noise ?

[*Enters a Maid-servant*]

Maid-servant : Long live the King. The Queen has fainted in her tears.

Siddhartha : Injury can be by thought, words and deed. Vardhaman ! You have injured your mother by your words. Some way out must be found. I go, I quit !

Vardhaman : Father, I do not want to cause injury to anybody by my words. I shall marry in deference to your wish and my mother's importunity. I go with you in the service of my mother.

Siddhartha : Well said. That is what was expected of an obedient son like you. May you be glorious. Now bring your mother to consciousness and convey to her the happy tidings yourself. Let us go to your mother.

[*Curtain*]

Act IV

[Place : Recreation Hall outside the Palace. Time : Dawn. Direction : The Recreation Hall of Prince Vardhaman is just adjacent to a lake. It is artistically designed. Dancing peacocks are sculptured here and there and look so life-like. There are mural paintings, depicting natural scenes. Cushioned seats, velvety doors and curtained windows. Gentle rays of the sun are penetrating from the windows, eager to paint the married life of Vardhaman and Yashoda with golden hue.

Prince Vardhaman is standing serene and Yashoda is moving the lighted lamp circularly round him. After this ceremonial worship, she reverently bows down on her knees and salutes Vardhaman with folded hands.]

Vardhaman : Rise, Yashoda, rise ! How long will this stream of our married life continue to flow ?

Yashoda : So long as spring visits our gardens and the nightingale continues to pour forth her heart in melliflous music, our conjugal bliss will continue to shine like the milky way.

Vardhaman : But, my dear, happiness is always short-lived.

Yashoda : True, but happiness has different facets for different people. As the milky way is the constellation of countless stars ; so also the forms and shapes of happiness cannot be reckoned with.

Vardhaman : And give me one good reason why so many festivities were held on the occasion of our marriage.

Yashoda : The answer is simple. When the sun rises, a canopy of multi-coloured hue is spread in the east and Aurora dresses herself as a bride. The cool soft-scented breeze, like a chamberlain, seeks sanction of each flower it

touches. Flocks of birds rise in a musical chore from one direction to another. In the wave of happiness, there are bound to be bubbles of laughter.

Vardhaman : But bubbles burst soon.

Yashoda : My Lord, each bursting bubble is replaced by another. The process of replacement is eternal.

Vardhaman : Don't you think that this laughter and this happiness keeps us in an illusion.

Yashoda : Pleasure will remain pleasure ; and laughter will remain laughter. Oh, I can never forget the day when your father's consent for our marriage reached our place. A round of festivals started in our capital from that very day. Oh, what joy, what pleasure, what grandeur was there. There were celebrations in every house. Roads got carpeted with saffron and vermilion. We had lost all hope due to delay from your side. Personally I thought that there were beauties galore in Jambu Divpa and I had ghost of a chance. But it was ordained otherwise. It was written in the book of divine decrees that the stream of pleasure and happiness should flow in our city—in my heart. And that same stream has brought me unto your feet.

Vardhaman : Yashoda, your happiness is my happiness. But sometimes I feel I have done grave injustice to you by marrying you.

Yashoda : What injustice there can be, my Lord ! On the contrary, you have made me the most fortunate lady in the realm. By giving your consent to our marriage, you have fulfilled the most cherished desire of my life and lives to come. How many floral wreaths I laid at the feet of Lord Adinath with constant prayer that I should get the opportunity to serve you ; and Lord Adinath has been pleased to accept my prayers. Now I belong to you, and you belong to me. This thought makes me dance with rapture as does this peacock in this hall. By the grace of Lord Adinath, I have achieved the ambition of my life.

Vardhaman : Your prayer has been accepted—for better or for worse, that Lord Adinath alone knows. The *Butea Frondosa* (Kimshuk) blossoms red. But none can say whether the redness of flowers decorates the trees or brings out the flame burning in his heart.

Yashoda : Crimson is always symbolic of love. The redness which you see in the east comes from the vermilion in which Aurora is dressed when she descends in the sky. Look at these lamps in my tray. The red flame from the lamps circles round you.

Vardhaman : But do not forget my dear, that the lamp burns.

Yashoda : Blessed are those that burn in the welcome of their Lord.

Vardhaman : They burn with oil. And when the oil is consumed, the flame of ovation is gone.

Yashoda : The oil that gushes forth from my love will never end. My love will always shine like the Pole Star ; and the Great Bear of happiness will always revolve round the Pole Star.

Vardhaman : But the Pole Star is stationery in the sky, inspite of itself.

Yashoda : Nobody knows what goes on in the mind of another. But for myself, I had only one wish—to be in your service all my life.

Vardhaman : How can you be in my service, if I do not want any service from you.

Yashoda : The Lord never demands service. It is the devotee that derives pleasure in rendering voluntary service to the Lord. See that side. What a beautiful lake is over there. How lovely the lotus look in the morning light. The beetles are humming encomiums to the lotus. But the lotus are indifferent to the approach of the beetles. And yet the beetles gather from all direction to pay their homage to the lotus.

Vardhaman : Yashoda, these beetles are greedy creatures. They penetrate the lotus to suck honey out of it. And sometimes they get entrapped as the petals of the lotus close at the fall of night.

Yashoda : But they never nibble inside for their freedom.

Vardhaman : After all they are beetles. They do not know how to cut the shackles of their bondage. But man can always redeem himself from bondage.

Yashoda : Yes, man is gifted with the faculty of thinking.

Vardhaman : It matters not whether man is master or slave to his mind. What matters is his sense of discrimination. Man can cut his karmic bondage at his will and obtain liberation.

Yashoda : Liberation is always desirable.

Vardhaman : And what, if I seek liberation.

Yashoda : What, you...you, of all persons, is after liberation.

Vardhaman : Yes, Yashoda ! For past several years I have been thinking in that direction. Please do not misunderstand me, Yashoda. I never wanted to be caught in the bond of matrimony. It was the importunity of my mother and the behest of my father that I should marry I was duty-bound to obey my parents. When I did not agree to marry, my mother fell unconscious. My father admonished me that though I go about preaching non-violence, I had committed violence in speech by saying "No" to my mother. I had no answer. I had to marry lest I be held guilty of violence.

Yashoda : If you have me after marrying me, to suffer in silence all my life, you will be committing yet another act of violence.

Vardhaman : You will have to give up the feeling of pain on separation.

Yashoda : That may not be possible. I have observed so many austerities and fasts for the consummation of this marriage. For nights and days, I sat by the image of Parshvanath, constantly praying that he gave me a husband in his own image ; and in you I have found a husband in all respects alike to Lord Parshvanath.

Vardhaman : And I too prayed to the same Lord Parshvanath that he grant me the liberation which he Himself achieved. I must practise the religion of universal love, so that I may not be reborn in this world.

Yashoda : Your prayer will be granted, when the time will come for it.

Vardhaman : But I want my redemption right now. I want to be free from all mundane things that keep man in bondage.

Yashoda : I shall not keep you in bondage, my Lord.

Vardhaman : I know for myself what is bondage and how to get liberation from it. The two biggest bondages in this world are wealth and beauty.

Yashoda : It is bondage alone that leads to liberation. Just as a sinewyman takes out a nail by beating another into it, so also a wise man subdues his passions through his senses.

Vardhaman : You are expounding only an elementary truth ; while I am already on the road to liberation.

Yashoda : How ?

Vardhaman : Frist promise, you will not misunderstand me.

Yashoda : Whatever you do, will always be welcome to me. It can never displease me.

Vardhaman : Then listen carefully. I have abandoned that attractive and priceless necklace which your father presented to me on the occasion of our marriage.

Yashoda : Abandoned ! Why, where, how ?

Vardhaman : Into that deep lake. Yesternight I looked at it intensely and for long. Its precious stones were radiating with brilliance like the seventeenth constellation—Anuradha. The rays radiating from the precious stones seemed to strangle my throat from all sides. So I threw that necklace outside this window into that lake.

Yashoda : Oh, what a beautiful necklace that was. Each gem in it was priceless. My father travelled all the way to the Treasure Island to acquire that necklace for you.

Vardhaman : A thing may be priceless and yet be of no value. It all depends upon the objective with which you look at it. A thing really belongs to the place from whence it came. The gems of purest ray serene that came from the bottom of the sea must return to their rest there.

Yashoda : The logical sequence of your reasoning is that I too must return to my parents from whence I came. I am very much upset. If this be your thesis, you can abandon me also some day.

Vardhaman : Yes, Yashoda, everything has to be abandoned one by one. Power and pelf, beauty and charm perish with time. Truth alone survives. The world around us begets inquisitiveness ; inquisitiveness leads to knowledge, knowledge gives wisdom ; and wisdom teaches truth. It is the knowledge of truth that abides till the end. As an able archer can split the hair from his arrow ; so can the seeker reach the truth by penetrating into the essence of things.

Yashoda : Oh, my Lord ?

Vardhaman : As water empties out of folded hands drop by drop, the years of our life pass one by one. As a gust of wind scatters dry leaves, power and majesty vanish before time.

Yashoda : Lord Parshvanath must have preached as you do.

Vardhaman : In this context Lord Parshvanath also said that death takes away life in one single blow as a torrent of water washes away a bamboo bridge.

Yashoda : What is the way out, my Lord ?

Vardhaman : As an engineer directs the water in the channel, as a smith moulds the shaft, as a carpenter chisels the wood, so does a wise man control and subdue his senses.

Yashoda : Cannot a householder exercise control over his senses ?

Vardhaman : No, Yashoda. As it is difficult to extricate your clothes once they are caught in the thorny Karil, *Copparis Aphylla*, so also it becomes difficult for a householder to get rid of the sensual pleasures. As it is difficult to find out the direction in which the birds in the open sky fly, so also it is impossible to fathom the passions which these senses are heir to.

Yashoda : Whatever you speak is worthy of credence. But you have only recently entered the life of a householder. It is premature to seek exit therefrom.

Vardhaman : What is to be done first, need not be postponed to a later date. For those who are slow, time always flies ; but there is ample time for those who are quick. Discretion lies in how best you utilise time, and therein is real pleasure.

Yashoda : What pleasure you lack ! You are an Emperor. You are the Lord of Jambudvipa, you are the Conqueror of all the Frontiers.

Vardhaman : Like the fire and the earth, I love none and bear malice to none.

Yashoda : Not even me !

Vardhaman : My present plight is like that of a bird in a nest, seeking shelter against rain and storm.

Yashoda : So, as soon as the rain stops, you will fly away from the nest.

Vardhaman : Exactly so. As the wind scatters the cloud in the sky, so the days to come will severe all by bonds. My mind,

bereft of all shackles, will be in the enjoyment of permanent beatitude.

Yashoda : Then it is purposeless for me to paint my feet red, to put on ornaments and gorgeous dresses.

Vardhaman : That is for you to decide. They have no place in my way to renunciation.

Yashoda : If you will renounce this world, I will have to follow in your footsteps.

Vardhaman : That may not suit you, Yashoda. Your gentle body is not made for penance and austerity.

Yashoda : If penance cannot pain you, how can it be otherwise for me. My resolution follows your precept.

Vardhaman : Well said, Yashoda ! If nothing pains you, I will not be guilty of causing any *Himsa*.

Yashoda : You have my approbation in whatever you do. This I can say, with fire as my witness.

Vardhaman : I do not need any witness. Your words are sufficient guarantee for me.

[*Voices from behind the screen*]

Yashoda : What turmoil is this ?

Maid-servant : [*From behind the screen*] May come in ?

Yashoda : Come in.

[*Enter Maid-servant*]

Maid-servant : Hail, my Lady and my Lord ! The Chief of the Police has arrested a woman. She has been found to have lifted a pearl necklace while bathing in the tank. The pearl necklace belongs to your Lordship, so says the Police Chief.

Vardhaman : It is the same necklace which I threw in the tank.

Yashoda : That may be so.

Vardhaman : Send the lady and the Police Chief to us.

Maid-servant : As you wish.

Vardhaman : It is a peculiar feature of mammon that the more you spurn it, the more it wants to stick to you.

Yashoda : Not only my father, but the things given by him, are so much attached to you that they do not want to lose your company even for a moment.

[*Enter Chief of the Police and an humble woman*]

Police Chief : Victory be to the Lord and to my Lady ! I was on duty early morning, keeping a watch around the lotus-tank. I saw this lady running away stealthily after her bath. When I apprehended her and searched her clothes, this pearl necklace was recovered from her person. I had once seen this necklace round your Lordship's neck. I could easily guess that your Lordship must have been bathing in the tank, and later forgot to collect the necklace after your bath. This woman had stolen the necklace and was running away with it. I have caught her and present her to you. Here is the necklace. I await your Lordship's orders.

Yashoda : Yes, this necklace belongs to your Lord.

Vardhaman : Yes, it is that very necklace.

Police Chief : Then surely, this lady is guilty of theft.

Vardhaman : Theft ! I ask you lady, have you committed theft ?

Woman : No, my Lord, I am innocent.

Yashoda : Our Chief of the Police recovered this necklace from your person, and still you say you are innocent. You are weeping, but you cannot wash away your guilt by your tears. Who are you ? Reveal your identity.

Woman : My name is Vishakha. I live in this very town of Kundagram. My husband was an ordinary worker. He died last year.

Yashoda : Compose yourself. Our heartfelt sympathies for you. A woman without husband is like a river without water. But this has no bearing on your offence.

Woman : Madam, I have three sons. They are starving. My husband has left no money to enable me to bring up the three children. I cannot bear their pangs of hunger.

Vardhaman : Why did you not inform us about your poverty ?

Woman : Sir, I dare not. Who would grant permit to an insignificant woman like me to enter the royal palace ?

Vardhaman : The doors of our palace are always open to all citizens.

Woman : My neighbours stopped me. They told me that my presence in the palace will be reckoned as an ill-omen and I will be punished. My neighbours envied my husband. That is why they revel in our present misery.

Vardhaman : Chief, such unkindly neighbours should be spotted out and brought before us.

Police Chief : It shall be done, my Lord.

Yashoda : Where are your children at present ?

Woman : I could not bear the sight of my children writhing under the pains of hunger. So I left them on the door-steps of a rich man and came here to commit suicide.

Yashoda : What, you went to the tank with the intention to commit suicide.

Woman : Forgive me, Madam. A mother's heart cannot bear the suffering of her innocent children. I never went to the tank for a bath, I approached there with the avowed purpose to commit suicide. And it is there, that I discovered this precious necklace. I atonce could make



The doors of our palace are always open to all citizens. *p. 76*

it out that the necklace belonged to the royal family. Lest I should sin before I die, I was myself coming to deliver this necklace in the Palace. But I was apprehended in the way by the Police. I was hesitating to enter the Palace and I myself made a request to the Chief of the Police to have the necklace sent to the Palace. But instead of conceding to my request, the Chief has arrested me on a charge of theft.

Police Chief: A culprit seldom spoke the truth. She made that request to me as an escape ; and that too after she was apprehended.

Vardhaman : A prayer for her redemption ! —I don't think she even understands the difference between 'escape', 'redemption' and 'salvation'.

Woman : I do not anything, my Lord. You may punish me as you like. But it is my good fortune that through the medium of this necklace, I have been able to see with my own eyes my King and my Queen, which it was not otherwise possible.

Vardhaman : You are a wise woman. [*To the Police Chief*] Visit this lady's house ; and if what she says is true, proper arrangement should be made for the rearing up of her children. They shall be brought up at State expense. Give them shelter in the destitute home.

Police Chief: That shall be done, my Lord !

Woman : [*Falls at the feet of Vardhaman*] My Lord, thou art great, thou art merciful. You are just, you are the protector of your subjects, you know the suffering of the poor. May you be our King in this birth and in the births hereafter, and we be your loyal subjects always.

Yashoda : And you Chief of the Police, listen to me. This necklace has already been abandoned by the King. Distribute its gems among families who are suffering from abject poverty. Let a few gems go to this poor lady also.

Police Chief: As you wish, my Lady.

Vardhaman : This decision of yours is highly commendable, Yashoda. It has given me immense satisfaction and delight. [*To the Chief*] Let the Queen's orders be carried out forthwith. And a list of the recipients of the jewels from this necklace should be submitted to our Treasury Officer.

Police Chief : If you permit, Sir, let the jewels be distributed by the Treasurer. I shall be present there to carry out your orders.

[*The Chief of the Police lifts the necklace from the foot-rest*]

Woman : The Queen is the goddess of piety and the King is the god of virtue.

Police Chief : Now, come out lady.

Woman : Long live the King and the Queen.

Police Chief : Amen ! [*Exeunt*]

Vardhaman : This is the prologue to my salvation.

[*Curtain*]

ACT V

[Place : Village Morak. Time : Evening. Direction : Mahavir Vardhaman is sitting under a Banyan-tree—bare-bodied, legs crossed, soles on feet turned upwards (Padmasan). Near him is standing his brother, Nandivardhan. The place is quiet and deserted]

Nandivardhan : So you have turned a mendicant ! With great difficulty, I could search you out here. Wherever I went, I was told you had left that place and moved ahead. I went to Kamari village, but did not find you there. I was told that a milkman there gave you lot of trouble. He had left his bullocks in your custody; on his return he did not find them with you. They went astray while grazing, and you were absorbed in your meditation—when he enquired about them, you did not reply. Next morning, the bullocks themselves returned and sat by your side. When the milkman saw the bullocks by your side, he thought you knew their whereabouts all the time and purposely withheld the information from him. He attacked you in a fit of anger, but you remained quiet and unperturbed. Then you shifted your quarters to village Kollag. When I went to that village, I was told that you had left from that place also. Ultimately, I found you here in this village Morak. Now I find that you have no attachment left and have turned a recluse.

Vardhaman : Brother, I had made the resolve much earlier ; only the execution of it has been so much delayed. I had made a promise to my parents that I will not become an ascetic in their life-time. Now that they are no more, there was nothing left to bind me to the life of a house-holder.

Nandivardhan : How about Yashoda ?

Vardhaman : She has always obeyed me implicitly. She also wanted to become an ascetic along with me. She had gone to her parents for some time. I thought it an opportune time to give up all worldly ties and become a recluse.

Nandivardhan : Vardhaman, you have not decided wisely. When Yashoda returns from Kalinga and does not find you in the palace—what will be her plight, you cannot imagine. You are a great advocate of non-violence. But you did not pause for a moment to consider the magnitude of injury you would be inflicting on your wife by giving her such unanticipated shock.

Vardhaman : I have already told you that Yashoda will herself become an ascetic. Once a person takes to asceticism, he becomes indifferent to pleasure and pain, profit and loss, life and death.

Nandivardhan : You have failed in your duty to the State. By becoming an ascetic yourself, you have forced asceticism on your wife. You are called Mahavir Vardhaman—Is this escapism your criterion of valour and bravery. You do not know what things are to be done and when.

Vardhaman : Right and wrong are comparative terms. They depend on one's circumstances and angle of vision. A sign or a symbol may be indicative of many words ; but there are people who stick to only one meaning of it. Then blame me not if I get at all the indications and symptoms of one single word. I am happy in my own creed. Having savoured of nectar, I no longer desire to taste hemlock.

Nandivardhan : Are courtly dignity and honour, jewels and ornaments, wife and children poison ? Was your coronation, a poison given to you ?

Vardhaman : My real coronation was when I gave up bead of pearl and jewel, caskets of gold and silver, and took to this earthen bowl.

Nandivardhan : I do not know what pleasure you get in begging for food in this tattered dress of a mendicant, when you could have the choicest dishes in your palace.

Vardhaman : I will give up even this tattered dress of a mendicant; and I need not beg for food. The pleasure of self-realisation far exceeds the pleasure of a hundred dainty dishes.

Nandivardhan : That may be alright. But I cannot bear the sight of an heir to the throne, sitting on a dusty ground. A prince who has dallied in lotus tanks, should thirst for drops of water !

Vardhaman : Brother, having tasted nectar, I no longer need water. I have lifted myself out of this worldly tank and have landed on the road to salvation. A man who has self-control can appreciate the virtues of non-attachment.

Nandivardhan : But what if the mind rebels.

Vardhaman : A mind still as a mountain, indifferent to the glamours of the world, can never rebel. And if it rebels, I shall bring it under control, as a *Mahout* brings the elephant under control by his trident. You will recollect that a few years back I did bring under control an elephant run amuck.

Nandivardhan : Any *Mahout* can control an elephant ; but even sages have failed in subduing their passions.

Vardhaman : Brother, there is no lust left in me. And I have plucked from my heart the arrow of desires and hankerings. I fear none. I have set ablaze the cycle of birth and I have burnt all karmic bondage. I am sure, there shall be no rebirth for me.

Nandivardhan : You may not be reborn, but what about life in this birth ? Like a dead-wood thrown in the jungle, will you spend the rest of your life in the forests ?

Vardhaman : This human body is itself a tabernacle of least permanence. I have broken loose the shackles of this frail tabernacle. From minarette to basement it is all gone—I see no palaces before me.

Nandivardhan : After all, what are you going to achieve by roaming about in the forests ?

Vardhaman : Peacocks with beautiful plumage and long necks dance, the cuckoo sings, the antelopes graze on velvety green grass, waves rise and fall in the spring—what peace and

tranquillity there is in nature! The trees washed with early showers waft on hill tops, after imbibing the cool fragrant breeze the birds wake up the hermits to the sound of their music. People who are full of jealousy and envy and live in a world of selfishness are strangers to music that flows from rustling trees and chirping birds.

Nandivardhan : Do not forget that you too have lived for thirty years in that world which you now call selfish.

Vardhaman : Yes, even when I lived in that sordid world, my mind always roamed in these forests. Now I am indifferent to this world and to the worlds hereafter. I need no longer any shelter or abode in this world.

Nandivardhan : So long as you live in this world, you can not be free of your insatiable desires.

Vardhaman : You will pardon me, for I speak from my own experience. By the sledge-hammer of death, the span of life is cut short every day. As a culprit is in constant fright of conviction, so is this world in constant fear of death and old age. To end that fear, I have uprooted in me all longings, yearnings and desires. Man is constantly changing. Today I am not, what I was yesterday. In the end, I want to tell you that I neither welcome death nor life. Keeping my faith in non-violence, I am just abiding my time.

Nandivardhan : So you have made up your mind not to return home with me.

Vardhaman : Please excuse me, my brother. It will not be possible for me to accompany you at present. But I promise you I will surely come to Kundagram sometime—not to rule but to beg alms. There are no barriers for me—I can visit any place any time.

Nandivardhan : Alright, I return alone. I have yet to see how far you can keep away the rest of your life from the lure and temptations of this world.

[*Nandivardhan leaves, having his last glimpses of Mahavir Vardhaman. Soon after his exit, Vina and Mridanga*

start playing from the other side of the screen. Three beautiful damsels enter on the stage, one after the other, dancing. They are the embodiments of the three qualities of piety, indulgence and perversity ; and have come down on earth to distract Mahavir Vardhaman from his meditation. The first lady is Supriya and represents piety. She is putting on a white sari ; the ornament on her forehead, her necklace, girdle, bracelets and anklets are all set in pearls and diamonds. There is sandal-paste on her forehead and her hair are dressed in nyctanthes flower. The second lady is Rambha and represents indulgence. Her sari is red and all the accompanying garments are red. The jewellery which she is putting on is all set in ruby. There is saffron paste on her forehead, with a red vermilion dot in the centre. Her hair are dressed in trumpet flowers. The third lady is Tilottama and represents perversity. She is wearing a blue sari and blouse to match. Her ornaments are all made of sapphire. She has blacking in her eyes, moles on her cheeks and musk-paste on her forehead, with a big black dot in the centre. There is blue lotus in her hair.

The three ladies make amorous blandishments at Mahavir Vardhaman, but he is sitting with his eyes shut, in deep meditation. The ladies dance before Vardhaman and laugh and jeer at him. They even mimic the pose of meditation in which Vardhaman is sitting. Tired and disgusted they sit in front and on the sides of Mahavir]

Supriya : Rambha, we have got tired of dancing before this saint, but he still continues to be in meditation. We could impress even Indra with our dance, but here is this gentleman who did not even care to look at us.

Rambha : I entirely agree with you Supriya—I have seen great *Munis* and saints whose eyes dance to the rhythm of our feet, but this gentleman is an exception. His eyes are lightly closed like the two lids of an oyster. He appears to be a great saint. Tilottama, you had pretensions to being a great *danseuse*. But today your dance has utterly failed.

Tilottama : There is celestial music in my anklets. But a man who is deaf cannot appreciate the music of the feet.

Supriya : If our beautiful faces could not raise the cupid in his heart, I must say the cupid has ceased to be cupid and has become an ordinary mendicant.

Rambha : Before a woman, every man becomes a beggar, begging for her love. But this saint, though ordained to be a beggar, is not a beggar of that type.

Tilottama : The lustre of our ornaments, lightens every dark corner, but here I find nothing but darkness. O Lord Parshvanath, instead of giving alms to the poor, give them eyes to see.

Supriya : To me this gentleman does not appear to be a human being, he is dead as a wood.

Tilottama : If my dance does not wake him up, I am going to commit suicide. Of what use is woman's beauty, if it can not attract a man towards her.

Rambha : These ornaments are a dead-load on me, and these garments are piercing me like thorn.

Supriya : We have been talking all this while, but there is no response from him. He is so economical of words. What sermon can he give to his disciples !

Rambha : That is not the way to win him over. Let us approach him individually—each for herself.

Tilottama : So be it [*To Mahavir Vardhaman with folded hands*] O, my Lord ! There is a lecherous rich man in this village, who is out to seduce us by all questionable means. Please protect us from him.

Rambha : O, ye Saint ! I am enamoured of your austerities. Please take me in your lap and quench my pangs of separation.

Supriya : They say you were once a prince. Are we in any way inferior to the maids-in-waiting in the palace. Please condescend to caste a single glance on us.



I have cast the spell of cupid on him ; now there is no escape p 85

Rambha : I will blow to the winds all his renunciation, like fluffs of cotton. Supriya, I am told you are extremely agile and can bend like a creeper at every gust of wind. Now see, how I will bend him to my will. [*Throws her outer garment round Vardhaman*] Here is my snare, he cannot get out of it.

Tilottama : Rambha, your outer garments are only your outer self. I will tie him to my inner-most. There is great power in magic spell. [*Goes round Vardhaman, chants words of a sorceress ; brings her hand on her lips ; and thereafter blows at Vardhaman*] I have cast the spell of cupid on him ; now there is no escape for him.

Supriya : Tilottama, you are a great devotee of cupid. Your spell can never miss. Verily, there is no escape for this saint now.

Rambha : Where is the question of escape. Saints are by nature kind and generous. What sort of a saint is this, that inspite of our yearning for an embrace, he is not willing to oblige us.

Supriya : We were told that a saintly heart is as soft as butter. It should have melted long ago at our plight.

Tilottama : This man is made of sterner stuff. His heart is not as soft as butter. It is hard as a stone on the steps of a monastery.

Supriya : Let us go. This man is a real saint.

Rambha : We had been sent by King Nandivardhan to allure him ; on the contrary, we are getting allured towards him by his penance.

Tilottama : I am convinced, he is a solid good saint. How can we succeed, when even Queen Yashoda failed to keep him back to her palace, inspite of all her beauteous charm.

Supriya : He is born to do good to this world by his penance and meditation.

Rambha : I knew from the very beginning that even the biggest attractions of this world could not shake him from his meditation. Here I withdraw my outer garments which I threw round him.

Tilottama : I also take back the spell which I cast on him.

Supriya : Let us pay our humble tribute to such a great saint.

[*They take out the flowers from their hair and place them at the feet of Mahavir Vardhaman. Then they make respectful obeisance, one by one. After they are gone, Mahavir Vardhaman opens his eyes, gets up, and has a stroll. While pacing up and down, he recites the following verse :*

"As a well-armoured horse is victorious in a battle-field,
So also a self-controlled Muni, gets early salvation."

Absolute darkness on the stage, preceding the early dawn. Mahavir Vardhaman again pacing and reciting the following verse in early dawn :

"O ye man, you are your best friend, seek no other company,
Exercise self-control, and you shall be free of all suffering."

Enter two villagers]

1st Villager : We bow down to the Saint.

2nd Villager : We bow down to the great *Muni.*

1st Villager : This is village Asthik. It will be in your interest to leave this village. The village is doomed.

2nd Villager : Doomed it is, but there is still time to escape. A demon resides here. He comes in the evening. That demon is so cruel and dangerous, that he kills every man that comes his way. You will be well advised to leave this place before he appears.

Vardhaman : I shall not leave this place. I fear none. Fear is meant for those, who have no confidence in their Self. He alone is restless and upset, who has not discovered the Truth.

1st Villager : We are the residents of this village Asthik. I am Indragop and my companion is Chullak. We are in constant fear of that demon. He lives in this monastery. As soon as anybody comes here, he kills him.

Chullak : Sometime back another great saint had come to reside in the monastery. We apprised him of the situation here and requested him not to stay here. He did not listen to us and stayed over night. In the morning, the villagers saw his mutilated body lying outside the monastery.

Vardhaman : There is nothing to worry. This body is mortal. Nobody knows the years of earthly existence ordained to it. Therefore, it is best to maintain ones composure.

Chullak : There is peace everywhere except in my mind. Slavery is galling and subjection to one's wife is the worst slavery.

Vardhaman : Rain-water always percolates through the roof of a house not well-thatched. A man who has no self-control is prone to desires. Excess of desires leads to slavery of a woman.

Indragop : So long as we live in this world, how can we get rid of desires ?

Vardhaman : Practice makes a man perfect. A deep sea is always pacific. A lotus lives in water, but does not allow a single drop to settle on its leaves. Seclusion can be of great help to you.

Chullak : Even with my best efforts, I cannot be in seclusion. Wherever I go, my wife pursues me.

Vardhaman : A woman well-dressed, with jewellery and sandal-paste, is a snare thrown by cupid on man. Her form and

mood, her touch and smell, her spoken word—are the five nooses of the snare. Do not get entangled in them. Entanglement in them is what is called attraction towards woman.

Chullak : I am not attracted towards woman but it is the woman who runs after me. I do not know how to conduct myself.

Vardhaman : Praise not thyself, nor calumny others. Practise what you preach. Cast no aspersions on your elders. No one becomes great by outward show. Greatness comes from within. Little minds cannot do great acts, as an elephant cannot pass through a small gate. Be a man of pious resolves, and not a useless burden to yourself and to others—like an odourless blossom on a creeper.

Chullak : Your precepts have brought peace to my mind, as there is peace at home when my wife is cheerful.

Indragop : Why drag your wife in every conversation ?

Chullak : Because she says, I am incomplete without her.

Vardhaman : Nature has created everything complete in itself. Neither the sun nor the moon, neither the earth nor the sky, neither the river nor the mountain, nor even the fire—are incomplete in themselves. You too are not incomplete in yourself. Perversions create doubts in mind. And it is these doubts that give you a feeling of incompleteness. Air carries dust upwards, but the same dust returns down to the earth through the clouds. In the same way, discretion distils a confused mind.

Chullak : Now my mind is at perfect rest.

Indragop : And what should be my course of conduct ?

Vardhaman : Be a true *Shravak*. Get rid of all influences of previous birth. Do not expect anything from anyone, so that you may have none to fear. If you view this world in the true perspective, you will have no avarice left. As you get pleasure and relief on shaking off your ailment,

so should you be equally content on the completion of your life-span. See yourself in the mirror of religion. Your mind will then be free of *Karma*, suffering will be away from you and your mind will shine forth like the full moon.

Chullak : What should I do with my wife ?

Vardhaman : I have already told you that if you have to live with your wife, live like a lotus in water. Water tries to wet the lotus, but its leaves are always dry. Water-drops roll like pearl on lotus-leaves. If you have no attachment towards your wife, you will have changed that drop into a pearl. Otherwise, cupid will pluck at you again and again as a weed in a stream.

Chullak : I am obliged to you, Your Holiness ! You have told me the truth ; and wisdom has dawned on me.

Vardhaman : Intellect is like a burning fire in a dark night.

[*Loud laughter outside. Indragop and Chullak are terrified*]

Chullak : God save us. The demon Shulapani has arrived.

Vardhaman : Oh, that demon Shulapani about whom you have been talking so long.

Indragop : Yes, that same Shulapani. He lives in this very monastery. He does not allow anybody to stay here. He who insists on staying here, loses his life. You better shift from here.

Chullak : You can pass your night at my place. You will not be put to any inconvenience. In the bargain, my wife will have the benefit of your discourses. I cannot convey to her what you have taught me. On the contrary, she begins to teach me.

Indragop : You are equally welcome to my place. You will have all conveniences there.

Vardhaman : I feel no inconvenience at any place. I have the strength to face all troubles and tribulations.

Indragop : But we are sure, this demon will not spare you.

Vardhaman : So, you scent some danger. If death is imminent, I will consider that I have been relieved of earthly burden sooner than I anticipated.

[*Loud laughter again*]

Chullak : Make haste and leave this monastery soon.

Vardhaman : New surroundings create new problems. This night I will spend right here.

Indragop : To spend the night here, is to give invitation to death. We have told you before, that one saint has already given his life here.

Vardhaman : That saint must have been proud and conceited. Standing on the brink, he must have professed to have reached the depth of religion.

Indragop : But this demon is so cruel that he draws no distinction between a real and a pseudo saint. He has infinite power. He falls on his prey like lightning and thunder.

Vardhaman : Let him fall on me. As fruit fall off from a tree, I shall also fall off from my body.

[*Loud laughter again*]

Indragop : There he comes. He will kill me. Here I go.

Chullak : Permit me also to go. I dare not tarry here any longer. He will not spare me. I am the only husband of my wife. What will be her lot, when I am no more.

[*Both quit hastily. Vardhaman goes into deep meditation. Enters Shulapani in awesome appearance. Locks of hair are scattered from his head. His face is painted red and white. He is putting on a scarlet robe, with a yellow waiste-band. He is bare-footed. He again laughs lustily*]

Shulapani : Aha ! Again somebody has come in this monastery to give his life. As moths come to give their life before the lamp, so does my prowess attract simple fools for my food. Now, you come and surrender your life unto me. Don't you know that I am the sole proprietor of this monastery. [*Laughter again, then looks intently at Mahavir*] Strange, this man did not run for his life ; he did not beg of me to spare him. [*Goes round Mahavir Vardhaman*] Now, I have circumscribed him ; he is in my clutches ; he cannot run away. [*Loudly*] Who are you ? Speak out, you simpleton ! Why are you so indifferent towards your life ? [*Vardhaman does not speak*] Are you alive ? Or, you want to court death in utter silence. [*Again looks intently at Mahavir*] This much is certain, that you are at present alive. [*Laughter*] Though alive, you are pretending to be dead. Open your eyes, and see the messenger of death right before your eyes. [*Beats the ground lustily with his feet. But Mahavir Vardhaman remains unperturbed*] This is a strange human being. None of his senses respond. His face shows no signs of commotion or fear. [*Again goes round Mahavir in great amazement*] In all my life, I have not come across such a man. He is so courageous, that having entered my monastery, he is sitting here so fearlessly as if the land of this monastery were his own domain. [*Pauses and thinks*] Best it would be that I lift him from this place and throw him down right here. But it will be an insult to my vigour to throw him down. There is no comparison between the mighty I and this frail man. His limbs are like the broken twigs of a tree. I will adopt other means to kill him. I will suck life out of him by the force of my *Mantras.* [*Stands in front of Mahavir Vardhaman and tries to draw the breath out of him*] Here I pull out his breath. [*Moves his hand forward and backward repeatedly*] Here I pull out the fire in him, here I draw out the lustre from his eyes ; here I pull the very ground on which he is sitting. [*All his sorceries and magical efforts fail*] It is strange that my magical charms had no effect on this man. Neither his breath bated ; nor did the earth slip under his feet. This man appears to me to be most strange. All my powers have failed before him. This is an insult and a challenge to me. Does not matter...

I shall use more deadly weapons in my armoury. I am going to throw at him my deadly cobra, Chanda Kaushik. Come, my Chanda Kaushik, come. Kill this man, by your one deadly breath. [*Goes in and brings a deadly snake*] Here is my Chanda Kaushik ! Come, parch this man with your venom, as the forest-fire consumes the entire forest. Today I am putting you to your biggest test. Girdle yourself so firmly round his neck that he gets strangulated, and then finish him by a single sting. Go, get on to his neck. [*Throws the serpent round the neck of Mahavir Vardhaman ; but the snake rests there hanging loosely like a garland. Shulapani again goes round Vardhaman and examines the reptile from all angles*] What, even you have failed to kill this man. It is most strange. You are notorious for turning even a tree into dead wood by your one single bite. But here you are just resting like a wreath of flowers. Damn yourself, Chanda Kaushik ! you have belied all my expectations ! [*Paces up and down in sheer disgust*] I am sure this man knows his *Mantras* well ; he has cast a spell on my Chanda Kaushik ; otherwise the poor creature would not lie so listless. He has lost all his stock of poison. Or else, Chanda Kaushik has betrayed me. Fie, unto thee. You have betrayed my confidence. You have failed in your test. Come out of that neck. I have no use for you there. [*Takes out the snake from the neck of Mahavir Vardhaman and throws it on the ground*] This man wants to test my powers. But I am not going to admit defeat at his hands. I am Shulapani. I will pierce his head with my spear-head. I am going to bring my spear. [*As soon as he is about to walk in, the snake, lying on the ground, bites him. He looks at him pensively and groans*] Oh, you have bitten me, instead ! Is this the way, Chanda Kaushik, to compensate the man who has brought you up ? So, I must first severe *your* head with my lance. [*Tries to enter the monastery to bring his lance, but stumbles on the ground*] Oh, what deadly poison ! It has curdled my blood. What an irony ! My own pet should sting me ! My whole body is in flames. Where was thy venom when thou wert couched on the neck of this man ! [*Tries to sit up, but again falls to the ground*] I burn, I die ! Save me ! I never knew that the

poison of this rascal Chanda Kaushik is so deadly... [*To Mahavir Vardhaman*] O Great Soul ! You alone can now save me. I have sinned by insulting you. Forgive me. Save me, O worshipful Saint ! I am dying. You alone can subside the flames rising from this deadly poison. I am sure you can. All things are under your control. Then, will you not save a dying man !

[*Vardhaman opens his eyes, looks at him and goes to him*]

Vardhaman : Shulapani ! The snake had stung you. But do not be upset. I will not let you die. When I came here, I had spotted a herb in your monastery, which is an antedote to snake-poison. Having some knowledge of *Ayurveda*, I can locate that herb. Anon, I shall apply it, where you have been bitten.

Shulapani : Please apply it soon. I shall be beholden to you all my life ; and shall be in service bound.

Vardhaman . I need no service. Here I go to bring the herb for you, [*Mahavir Vardhaman brings the herb from a corner, administers it and also offers it to Shulapani*] Shulapani ! Inhale this herb, inhale it deeply.

[*Shulapani takes deep breaths at the herb*]

Vardhaman : The venom must now be slowly subsiding.

Shulapani : Worshipful Master ! I am regaining my composure ; and the poison is gradually losing its potency.

[*Enter Indragop and Chullak hurriedly*]

Indragop : Hail, O Great Saint ! When we heard the groans of Shulapani from a distance, we could make out that you had given him fitting punishment.

Chullak : I join in the praise to the Great Saint, both on my behalf and on behalf of my wife.

Shulapani : I also join you both. I was almost dead. My own pet snake Chanda Kaushik had bitten me lustily. If this

Saint were not here, I would have been dead by now. In my own monastery there is an antidote for snake bite ; but I could not spot out the herb so far. But this Great Saint plucked that herb, applied it to the place of bite, and the snake-poison vanished from my body. I do not know where Chanda Kaushik has disappeared.

Chullak : We thought you were dead. My wife sent me here to cremate you.

Shulapani : Surely that Shulapani who insulted this Great Saint is dead. This is his rebirth.

Indragop : Praise be to that Saint, who is above all honour and calumny. You showered abuses and insult on him, he gave you life in return.

Shulapani : Yes, Victory be to this Great Saint.

Chullak : Your praises are empty hollowness. You have killed innumerable saints, and now you are singing their praises. Even your Chanda Kaushik got tired of your atrocities. He could not bear the insults you showered on such a saint ; and, therefore, he bit you hard.

Shulapani : (*Rises*) Now I am alright, as though I was never bitten by a snake. [*Falls at the feet of Mahavir Vardhaman*]

Indragop : I knew from the very beginning that he is no ordinary saint.

Chullak : If he were an ordinary saint, he could not have escaped the ire of Shulapani. My wife's temper is not less than that of Shulapani. I have escaped her temper narrowly every time.

Shulapani : I did not at first fathom the greatness of this saint. I spoke ill words to him, I insulted him, but he remained absolutely quiet. He never replied to me. But when the snake stung me, he atonce came to my rescue. I am gratified by meeting such a great saint. Hail to you ! Victory be unto you, O Great Saint. I do not know how the venom of the serpent has vanished.

Vardhaman : The poison of the world is much more terrific than the poison of the snake. Seek escape from the former.

Shulapani : Surely I will try. Make me your disciple. You need not. I have myself become your disciple. I will make penance for all the evil deeds I have hitherto done.

Vardhaman : Your greatest repentance will be that you give up all evil deeds from today. Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not lose temper. Rise above praise and insult. Serve your countrymen. Commit no violence. Non-violence is the highest religion. While practising non-violence, look to the common weal. Proclaim the truth fearlessly and as boldly as the lion roars in his cave.

Shulapani : I shall follow every precept of yours.

Chullak : You have no option, Mr. Pupil. Now be ware of saints. This time this saint saved you. But if you misbehave again, even an ant-bite may prove fatal.

Indragop : Such saints are a class *per se*. [*To Mahavir Vardhaman*] Great Sage make me also your disciple. By now all of us know that you are Lord Mahavir Vardhaman.

Chullak : Me too and my wife too.

Vardhaman : Practise non-violence, develop faith and subdue your passions and you will be relieved of all sin.

Shulapani : So be it.

Vardhaman : A householder's *Dharma* lies in non-attachment, considering the transitoriness and impermanence of things :

"Conquer anger by equanimity ;
Conquer pride by modesty ;
Conquer deceit by simplicity ;
And conquer greed by contentment."

All : Victory unto Tirthankar Mahavir Vardhaman !

[*Curtain*]

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